

Government requests to remove content

Courts and government agencies around the world regularly request that we remove information from Google products. We review these requests closely to determine if content should be removed because it violates a law or our product policies. In this report, we disclose the number of requests we receive in six-month periods.

How government requests are made

We receive content removal requests through a variety of avenues and from all levels of government — court orders, written requests from national and local government agencies, and requests from law enforcement professionals. Sometimes users will forward us government removal requests, such as when someone attaches a court order showing certain content to be illegal. Some requests ask for the removal of multiple pieces of content, and, conversely, there may be multiple requests that ask for the removal of the same piece of content.

Evaluating requests

We always assess the legitimacy and completeness of a government request. In order for us to evaluate a request, it must be in writing, as specific as possible about the content to be removed, and clear in its explanation of how the content is illegal. We don't honor requests that have not been made through the appropriate channels. If we receive a verbal request, we ask for it in writing.

Court orders

We evaluate court orders in a number of different situations. Sometimes an order creates obligations on Google; we review these orders to determine what our obligations are and whether to appeal. We also voluntarily act on some orders that aren't directed to Google, in deference to courts' authority to determine if a piece of content is illegal according to local law. We may also use a court order that doesn't directly find content illegal as evidence to help us evaluate a request - for instance, we're more likely to remove links to content that a court has found to be false, including in some cases in jurisdictions beyond that of the original order. We examine the legitimacy of every document we receive and if we determine that a court order is forged, we won't comply. We also examine the

applicability of all documents we receive; court orders provided as supporting evidence to a claim that don't relate to content removal do not compel Google to take any action.

Reasons we don't remove content

There are many reasons why we may not remove content. For example, some requests might not be specific enough for us to know what the government wants us to remove. In these cases, we ask for more information. Other times, we don't take action because the content has already been removed by the content owner. Sometimes we even receive requests to remove content "from the Internet."

Google policy removals

The data in this report does not include content removals that we regularly process every day in response to non-governmental user complaints across our products. These complaints may cite violation of our content policies or community guidelines. For example, we do not permit hate speech in Blogger and other similar products.

Categorization of requests

When we receive a request to remove content, whether through our formal webforms or informally through other channels (e.g., public policy team), the person reporting generally specifies a reason for their complaint. Some requests may allege infringement of intellectual property rights, while others claim violation of local laws prohibiting types of content on grounds such as defamation. When we receive complaints regarding content on our platforms, we carefully evaluate complaints to ensure they're categorized correctly.

Removals vs. blocking

Some governments and government agencies choose to block specific services as a means of controlling access to content in their jurisdiction. The content removal numbers we've reported do not include any data on government-mandated service blockages. Our traffic graphs may show you when Google services have been inaccessible.

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We share this information to shed light on the scale and scope of government requests for content removals. We hope to draw attention to the laws and legal processes around the world that affect access to information online. Share this page on social media to bring more attention to these laws.

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